

The Builder.

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THE society for obtaining baths and wash-houses for the labouring classes advertised, some time ago, for plans and estimates for erecting and fitting up the first establishment in London. Nearly a hundred architects, it is said, applied for the particulars; and the designs were sent in on Saturday last. It is unnecessary to say we shall look anxiously for the decision of the committee. We beseech them to reflect on the time and thought which have been expended on the production of these designs, and to decide fairly and honestly, with especial reference to the instructions that were given to the competitors. These instructions must be constantly before the committee during their examination. The plans in which they are complied with in the most perfect and satisfactory manner, should unquestionably be selected. We are so accustomed to find competitions managed badly and decided unjustly, that we can hardly bring ourselves to anticipate a better result in the present case. Feeling very strongly, however, on the subject, we call earnestly on each member of the committee to act as if the whole responsibility rested on himself. If they will do this—if they will decide as individuals open to question, and not with the feeling that they merge in the body, there will be little reason to cavil at their decision. As an incentive to such a course, they may be reminded that many eyes are upon them; and that by exciting an ill feeling against themselves in this respect, they would greatly injure the important object they have in view. Our readers may rest assured that we shall return to this subject when the plans are fairly before the public.

In the meantime we would make a few observations on the general question of baths and wash-houses, and urge the public to provide funds suitable to the greatness of the occasion.

The committee are anxious to carry out the plan on an extensive scale. They wish to begin with four model establishments in populous districts—three on the Middlesex side, and one on the Surrey side of the river, and they have advertised their desire to purchase land for sites. As yet, however, they have not received sufficient money to do all that is required, and we would gladly aid in obtaining it for them.

Assertions have been made that our poorer brethren will not avail themselves of the contemplated advantages when they are offered to them; that they prefer dirt to cleanliness; and various others equally unjust and libellous. The baths and wash-houses at Liverpool will of themselves afford sufficient answer to such statements. We can from them set facts against conjectures, and render unnecessary all querulous suppositions of what may take place by shewing positively what has occurred. We have recently visited the Liverpool establishment (in Frederick-street), in order to judge for ourselves, and were thoroughly satisfied with the result. It was there a mere experiment, and the establishment is very small. They have eighteen baths in three

classes, for which the charge is respectively 1s., including the use of two towels, 6d. and 3d. with use of one towel. For cold baths the charge is 6d., 3d., and 2d., formerly 1d. In the first year 11,661 baths were taken, and in the second, 16,323; the majority being warm. The keeper informed us, that the average number of bathers in summer was from 100 to 150 each day. In winter the number is small. There is a vapour bath,—for which, with the use of three towels, 1s. is charged, but no plunging bath. The revenue last year, including the wash-houses, equalled the expenditure within 1s., and this year will probably exceed it. In consequence of which and of the advantages found to result, Mr. Franklin, the town surveyor, has prepared plans for a second and more extensive establishment (including two plunging baths), which will be carried out immediately.*

The baths are open till 9 o'clock every evening in the week but Sunday; and on Saturday till an hour later. They are also open on Sunday morning from 6 till 8 o'clock in the summer, and from 7 till 9 in the winter. In these two hours on a fine morning, 50 or 60 persons usually avail themselves of the baths. In the London establishments there should be a proper place for the applicants to wait their turn, and it would be desirable if arrangements were made so that those persons who wished it might be shaved cheaply. There are many additional comforts that working classes might enjoy by co-operation, and gladly would we see them in the way of obtaining them. The labourer pays more for his cup of bad tea (when he gets it) than his more wealthy brethren do for good. With this, however, it is hardly our province to deal. The waiting-place should be decently fitted up, and if it were adorned with good prints, now so cheaply obtainable, might aid in improving the character of the visitants more powerfully than at first sight seems likely. Let us take them away for a time from their "coals and potatoes," hold up virtuous actions and heroic deeds for admiration, give them something to think about and talk about, and increase their self-respect.

Turning for an instant to the wash-houses: we found that the desire to avail themselves of these is even greater than of the baths, and that, although the establishment is not so extensively known in Liverpool as it ought to be, there were often more applicants than could be accommodated. There is room in the whole for twenty-six tubs, and these are usually all occupied. Each tub is furnished with pipes with hot and cold water, and has a plug by which it can be speedily emptied. There are two coppers to boil the linen, and a room heated by steam and fitted up with iron slides, termed there "maidens," to dry the clothes. The charge for the use of one tub from six till twelve o'clock is a penny, and for the whole day two-pence.

To those who have visited the abodes of the poor, the courts and alleys of great towns,—who have found a father, mother, and seven or eight children of different ages with only one small room for all purposes;—with, perhaps, a bed-ridden grandmother or sick child—it is unnecessary to point out the important boon which will be afforded to that class by the establishment of public wash-houses. In such a position cleanliness is out of the question; and moral degradation must follow its abandonment. To those who have not seen it we

* The site chosen is in Paul-street, a poor and crowded part of Liverpool.

would say, think on the fact that thousands of families are in this state, and worse, and you must recognize the value of the endeavours now being made, and will feel disposed to assist them. The establishment of public wash-houses will at once improve considerably the dwellings of a very numerous class.

In the arrangement of the plans about to be submitted much attention must be given to questions extra-architectural; such as the supply of water to the baths and mode of heating it, construction of the drying-rooms, heating and ventilating the apartments, &c. To these we shall recur anon.

DOINGS UNDER THE METROPOLITAN BUILDINGS ACT.

THE official referees are active in their vocation. The subject of buildings commenced before the last of the present month, particularly alluded to in our leading article last week, is receiving special consideration. On the 19th of December last they issued a circular to the district surveyors, requesting them to make a return, as early as possible after the 1st inst., of all buildings commenced before that day and then unfinished, distinguishing the classes and rates and the respective situations of such buildings. On the 3rd inst. they sent out another circular with reference to the last, wishing to know to what height from the base of the footings such buildings had been carried on the 1st, and asking information of any circumstances respecting them which the surveyors might think necessary. It had been represented to them, the letter stated (and it is true enough), that, "in some cases, mere trenches have been excavated with nothing in them; in others, a skimming of concrete is laid in the trench; in some, a course of clinkers merely, and in others, a single course of bricks. In others, again, a foundation is put in to only part of the walls, without its being continued so as to be united at the back or ends;" and they wished to know, as early as possible, the number of buildings in such or similar circumstances. How they will decide in such cases, should the question of exemption or otherwise come before them, remains to be seen, but is not very doubtful.

One of the earliest, if not the first, application to a magistrate under the new Act, was made at Lambeth, on the 10th inst., when Mr. Southby, firework-manufacturer, applied to the Hon. Mr. Norton, to solicit his interference to prevent the erection of a varnish-manufactory near his premises. Mr. Southby said if the building were permitted it would be highly dangerous, and a serious loss of life might ensue from the combustible materials. The building was within 50 feet of his premises. There was also a great deal of timber in an adjoining yard, and should an explosion take place the consequences would be frightful.

Mr. Norton said the person had clearly no right to erect such a building, and asked if there was a public way?

Mr. Southby stated there was.

Mr. Norton immediately sent an officer of the court, with the applicant, to inform the person that he must discontinue the building, and that, under the 54th clause of the new Building Act, he was liable to a penalty of 50s. per day, every day the business was carried on, and, in default of payment, was liable to be sent to the House of Correction for six calendar months, with hard labour.

The official referees have adopted a measure which is likely to be exceedingly useful, namely, lithographing the correspondence from and to certain surveyors on matters connected with the new Act, and transmitting a copy to each district surveyor, for his instruction and guidance. The Act, from its complicated nature, is as yet but little understood by either surveyors or builders,* and, in order to spread information on the subject, we propose to give our readers the substance of each case as it occurs.

* Many of the builders and fine-worshers have been astonished at the interference of the district surveyor when erecting a funnel or smoke-pipe on a chimney-shaft. Nevertheless, he would seem to be justified; if he be right, above the brickwork, notice must be given of such work, and the fee paid, or the penalty may be incurred. See Sect. 12, and Sched. F, Art. Chimney-pots, tubes, &c.